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(continued)

Orlando World Center Marriott



New tech, F&B and pool highlights massive renovation

Two years in the making, the **Orlando World Center Marriott** has completed a multimillion dollar renovation. The lagoon pool, restaurants, decor and architectural structures that have long defined the 2,000-room resort for the past 26 years have been completely reimagined. Replacing them, there are now towering waterslides and an event lawn in the Falls Pool Oasis, fresh restaurant concepts and a long list of updates that maximize corporate functions.

The project began with the revitalizing of 120 suites in 10 varieties, including the North Tower's 514 guest rooms and 14,000 sf of dedicated meeting space.

"The North Tower gives a hotel within a hotel feel," says Gary Dybul, director of sales/marketing. "For large groups, there's additional meeting space, 10 restaurants, spa and a pool area."

Renovations included the lobby and guest rooms, new carpeting, new lighting and technology for the 14 meeting rooms leading to the convention center, and the 450,000-sf convention center itself, filled with natural light and breezy pastels.

Orlando World Center Marriott is a pilot test property for the Marriott's new worldwide **Red Coat Direct** meeting planner technology program. When a meeting planner books a group, their meeting and function space is loaded into Marriott's system. The planner then downloads that information to their personal smart phone, tablet or computer.

"The beauty of Red Coat Direct is that the planner is in complete control of the meeting from anywhere in our complex," says Dybul. "Room temperature can be changed, coffee can be ordered, or an unscheduled break built in at the last minute all without having to first contact an event manager."

We asked what the response has been so far.

"The response has been fantastic," Dybul said. "Technology has been explosive in meetings. We've tripled our bandwidth

and increased hot spot points in our meeting space. Planners are looking for that consistent technology, wireless service and high bandwidth. It's not the sexiest thing we've done, but it's one of the most critical for planners."

Our group enjoyed the diversity of the Falls Pool Oasis. Off to one side of the pool, the newly created Falls Pool Bar & Grill seats 180. The entire pool deck can accommodate 3,000.

"The renovation allowed us to build a destination at the pool for pre-and-post stays," says Dybul, adding that many groups build in a family activity. "Our customers have said that Orlando meetings attain the highest attendance of any other cities, and contributing to that is the family component."

NEW MODERN MENUS

Inside the upscale **Hawk's Landing Steakhouse & Grill**, our group learned how to make bourbon bacon cocktails during a mixology class. Then we divided into teams to prepare our gourmet lunch under chef supervision. Both the mixology and cooking sessions are group options.

We learned golfing basics in chipping, putting and driving from two instructors and Bill Madonna, for whom the golf academy is named. Few in our group had ever golfed, but the instruction was so clear that all of us were amazed at how quickly the 90-minute lesson flew by.

We breakfasted at **Solaris**, a lobby restaurant seating 471 guests. Like all the resort's menus, the food is locally sourced. Nearby, the urban Italian restaurant **Siro** opened in January. The rustic but contemporary venue dishes up a tapas menu with international flair. It's just one of a thousand ways that makes Orlando World Center Marriott a completely new resort.

marriott.com; orlandomeeting.com